

REFLECTIONS  
UPON  
REASON.

---

By *Phileleutherus Britannicus.*

---



---

L O N D O N :

Printed for *W. and J. Innys*, at the *Prince's Arms*, at the West-End of *St. Paul's*.  
MDCCLXXII. Price One Shilling.

COLLECTIONS

OF

REASON



OF

THE BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON.  
PRINTED BY THE MUSEUM, 1851.





# REFLECTIONS UPON REASON.

**T**HE Confusion introduced into our Language by the abuse of Words, which have through length of Time been perverted from their natural and primitive Signification, has been learnedly observed, and sincerely lamented by a Right Reverend Prelate of our Church. I have often wished that the same judicious Hand, that has endeavoured with uncommon Zeal to rescue some Words from this lamentable Abuse, such as *Church, Religion, &c.* would have also shewed some Regard to that much perverted and abused Word *Reason*. The Abuse of which, has been as fatal to Mankind, as prejudicial to the publick Peace, and the interests of Truth, as those others which he has so elaborately endeavoured to explain. Not to

mention that his Lordship would hereby have wonderfully obliged several of his Admirers, pretty Gentlemen, who have heartily abjured Priestcraft, Bigotry, and slavish Submission to Authority, and boldly and resolutely assert the Dignity of human Reason; yet for want of a right Understanding of the Word have been forced to defend it in a most unreasonable Manner with Nonsense and Absurdity. In short there is scarce a Word in the English Tongue of a more general, uncertain, indeterminate Signification. Every wrong headed Mortal calls his Misunderstanding his *Reason*; every Man's different Way of apprehending or misapprehending Things is *Reason*. So that there is no opinion so absurd, no Notion so silly, no Position so monstrous, but is defended and justified by *Reason*. And should a Man of the finest Understanding attempt to rectify the false Notions of one of these minute Philosophers, should he lay open his Sophistry, and endeavour to give him a right View of Things, he adheres pertinaciously to his first false Judgment, and though he can neither answer the Arguments alledged against him, nor offer any in his own Defence, but what have been clearly answered, yet he abides by his Prejudices, which he calls his *Reason*, and in which he thinks himself bound to acquiesce. His *Reason*, he says, is his Guide, and he is bound to admit nothing contrary to it, but to oppose and reject it. Very right, and so he is; but if every Man shall call his own particular Way of thinking and judging by that oracular Name, he will make it the most uncertain

tain fallacious Thing in the World, for it must be as various as the different Complexions, Educations, Tempers, and almost Features of those who pretend to it. The *Reason* of the meanest Mechanick or Labourer, is as good as that of a Philosopher or a Divine, and the Lunatics in *Moorfields* have as good Pretensions to it as the Gentlemen of the Royal Society; for as mad as they are, they think, and draw Conclusions, and very often as just, as some that are drawn by Great Pretenders to Reason and Philosophy. *Reason* then in this Sense is so far from being a Rule, an infallible Standard of Truth, that it is a source of Error and Confusion. It will therefore be worth while to examine a little into the different Meanings of this obscure equivocal Word, that we may proceed in our Reflexions upon it, with less Perplexity, by determining its precise Signification. whenever it occurs in the same or different Senses.

I. The first and most natural Meaning of the Word *Reason*, is the abstracted ideal Truth of Things, or the Analogy that runs through the whole System of Nature; by which I mean those certain Proportions, Connexions and Relations, that are between the several Ranks and Orders of Beings, and their Ideas, and those Propositions of eternal Truth, that arise from compounding and comparing their several Natures, Habitues, and Relations: and this ideal Truth, this Analogy of Nature, is the *Ratio*, the Reason, the Nature, the Order, the Truth of Things. We are to consider, that the All-wise God, whom

Plat



Plato calls *The Great Geometrician*, composed the World in *Number, Weight and Measure*, with the most exact Harmony, the nicest Symmetry, the most delicate Proportion; every Part answering to each other and to the whole so exactly, that the Correspondence should be perfectly regular, steady, and uniform: like a well wrought Machine, in which all the Parts are so exquisitely proportion'd to each other that they readily answer the intention of the Artificer. And the Mechanism of every such Structure is not improperly called its *Ratio*. In this Sense *Tully* speaks of the several Laws of Motion impressed or implanted in the different Parts of Nature, thus in his Book *De Natura Deorum*, l. 2. p. 529. Ed. Gr. he speaks of the *astrorum ortus & occasus, atque in omni aeternitate ratos immutabilesque cursus*, which *Virgil* in his *Georgicks* calls the *Leges* and *Æterna Fœdera* which Nature has imposed on the several Parts of the vegetable World. And from this *Ratus Ordo*, arises the abstracted *Ratio* or Nature of Things. So in all Arithmetical or Algebraic Problems, the Proportion betwixt the several Numbers upon which the Analysis is formed, is called the *Ratio* of that Problem. In this Sense *Tully* mentions the Word, *T. 2. p. 529. b. Philip. 11.* Where speaking of that abstracted Truth of Things, which is the Foundation of universal Justice, Law and Equity; he says, *Lex est nihil aliud nisi recta à Numine Deorum tracta ratio*, i. e. that the Equity of every Law is nothing else but its agreement with that establish'd

Order and Analogy of Nature, which depends upon and answers to those archetypal Ideas and Truths that eternally existed in the Divine Mind.

II. A second and more obvious Sense of the Word *Reason* is that Faculty of the Soul which we properly call the Understanding, whereby we are enabled to apprehend and judge of this ideal Truth, or the Relations and Proportions which the several Parts of Nature bear to each other; and this we properly call *human Reason*, and these answer to each other as the Object and the Faculty. This ideal Truth is as properly the Object of the Understanding, as Light is of the Eye; and it is not to be doubted, but that the Understanding in its perfect State, in its original Purity, would as easily and naturally apprehend its proper Object, as the Eye rightly disposed, would perceive any visible Object at a due Distance, and thro' a due Medium. But as we find by sad Experience, that we want this intuitive Knowledge, that we are so far from being able to comprehend the whole System of Truth, the Connexion, the Harmony, and Beauty of *ideal Reason*, that we can only take it by Parts, and enter into it by slow Degrees: Hence arises

III. A third Sense of the Word *Reason*, by which we mean Argumentation, or that discursive Progression which we are forced to make from one Idea to another by comparing their different Habitues and Relations, and inferring one thing from another, in order to form Propositions and deduce Conclusions, upon the several

veral Subjects which we are endeavouring either to apprehend or explain; and this produces

IV. The fourth and lowest Sense of the Word, by which we understand the Medium or Method of Proof, which we are forced to use in explaining or defending the Truth of any Proposition, *i. e.* When we prove the necessary Relation of two distant Ideas, by shewing the Relation each of them bears to a third. Thus if we could imagine a Chain of infinite Length, it is plain that a finite Creature could take in no more by his Reason or his Senses, than some few Links of it; but were he to handle or draw one Link, he would quickly perceive that others at an invisible Distance were united to it, and depended on it, by being united to several intermediate Links, which held them together.

V. Hence it appears, that *Reason*, abstractedly considered, is nothing else but the *Truth* and Nature of Things. From whence it follows, that the apprehension of Things otherwise than they truly are in their own Nature, is not *Reason*, but Error and Mistake, and that he who forms Propositions, and draws Consequences from this erroneous Perception, does not reason, but trifle, plays the Fool, talks at random, disputes in the Dark, like a blind Man reasoning about Colours, or a deaf Man about Sounds, of which for want of proper Organs, they can have no Idea or apprehension at all.

VI. That the human Understanding or *Reason*, in its original Perfection, is capable of apprehending and judging of the Truth of Things,

is



is not to be doubted, any more than that the bodily Eye, was originally formed and intended for the Perception of Light, and visible Objects. Nor will this, I presume, be denied me by the Men of Reason, who set it up in its present feeble corrupt State, as the supreme infallible Judge of Truth; so that whatsoever their Reason cannot comprehend, cannot for that Reason be true. Whether the Essences of Things, which are spiritual, and in some Sense Eternal, be the proper Object of *human Reason*, I shall not now enquire; but that at present the most exalted Pitch of it is low and imperfect, its views short and limited, its apprehensions narrow and obscure, is beyond all Dispute certain. Were we to talk of Numbers, Duration, and Space, and many other Subjects in Philosophy, we shall soon perceive, that no finite created Understandings, can have Ideas adequate to their infinite Natures. We may, perhaps, apprehend the Meaning of the Words, and make a shift to define or explain what we mean, when we talk of them; but to comprehend them, to determine or explain their abstracted Natures, is impossible. When we think or talk of Space, we can only conceive a certain, indefinite Extension, and of that too we have no absolute Idea, but a bare relative Notion, formed upon the Situation we our selves stand in, when we reason or think about it; and though if we stretch our Imagination ever so far, we may yet conceive space beyond it, yet where to fix our *ne plus ultrâ* we know not. All that we conceive of absolute

and eternal Duration, is no more than a certain small Pittance or Portion of it, without any determinate Bounds or Limits. So in Numbers, we cannot compute or calculate so long, or so attentively, but we still find more Numbers behind; which, if I may so express my self, are still capable of infinite Additions. All therefore that we seem to be capable of knowing, is the several Habitues and Relations that some Parts of Duration, Space, and Numbers, bear to each other, upon which we reason, and from whence we draw Conclusions; and yet this Knowledge, as imperfect as it is, is great enough to be the steady Foundation of natural Religion and Morality.

VI. Tho' the Soul has this innate Power of apprehending and judging, yet it does not exert it by a physical or mechanical Necessity. Certain Dispositions are required, to prepare and enable it to judge aright of the several Objects and Truths proposed to it. As the bodily Eye, tho' made for the Perception of visible Objects, yet cannot exert that Power, if it be disordered by any Obstruction of the Optick Nerves, any Suffusion upon the *Retina*, if the Object be placed at an undue Distance, or viewed thro' a wrong *Medium*, in all these Cases the Eye perceives nothing as it really is, its Perception is confused and irregular, and the most beautiful Assemblage of Figures would be nothing but Oddness, Distortion and Deformity. Just so it is with the Soul, if it be under any Indisposition,  
any

any moral or natural Disorder, it apprehends, it judges of nothing aright.

VII. The moral Disorders of the Soul, which indispose her for the search and apprehension of Truth, are the Lusts of the Flesh, and the Vices and evil Habits of the Soul; by the former, I mean Intemperance, Lewdness and all other Instances of Debauchery; by the latter, Pride, Ambition, Malice, Covetousness and such like. That these Vices are in their own Nature Irregularities, or Deviations from the plain Duty of a rational Creature, is I hope too plain to need any Proof, being owned and condemned as such by all the heathen Writers of Morality. The fatal Effects of the former, upon the Minds and Understandings of Men, are very obvious, how they corrupt the Blood and Spirits, enfeeble and dry the Brain, weaken and destroy those delicate Fibres, that compose the several Organs of Sense, and, in a Word, shock and discompose the whole animal Frame; and so intimate is the Union, so close the Dependence betwixt Soul and Body, that the one cannot but be affected by the Disorders of the other: The active Powers of the Soul seem to languish and Decay under the Infirmities of a crazy and distemper'd Body. A Man may be lewd till he is as much past feeling, as he is past Shame; and may drink, till he has, in a literal Sense washed away his Senses, and drown'd his Understanding. So also the more inward and spiritual Vices of Pride, Ambition, Revenge, Covetousness, and the like, have no less dreadful Influence upon the Soul; they spread



a midnight Darkness and Obscurity over all the inward Senses, they cramp and fetter all the Faculties, they pervert the Will, suborn the Judgment, and stupify the Understanding; every Act, every Perception of the Soul is tinged with the prevailing Vice; and a Man under this moral Incapacity, can no more discern the Reason of certain Truths, the natural Beauty of certain Virtues, and deformity of certain Vices, than a Man can discern the Colour, Figure and Dimensions of certain Bodies, viewed thro' a wrong Medium, or at too great a Distance.

VIII. Having considered the Impediments that hinder Men in the Search of Truth, and exercise of *Reason*, it is next to be considered, what are the proper Dispositions required in a *Lover of Truth, a Philosopher, a Free-Thinker*. The first, and most necessary, are *Sincerity*, and *Industry*. By the former, I mean, a hearty Desire to discover and know the Truth, and Resolution to find out and apply all the necessary Means that may conduce towards it. By the latter, I mean, that steady patient Use of Means, that he will not be discouraged by Difficulties that may occur in his Search; nor through Impatience, be tempted to draw hasty and precipitant Conclusions, before the Premises have been duly and impartially weighed and considered.

IX. Truth is the proper Food of the Understanding, the true Nourishment of a rational Soul; and unless there be a kind of intellectual Hunger and Thirst, an eager Appetite of the Soul, it will either not labour at all, or very faintly

ly and unsuccessfully in pursuit of its Nourishment. That Soul can never discover the Truth, who is a professed Friend and Advocate for Error. So there are some that *love Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds are evil; for every one that doth Evil, hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, that his deeds may not be revealed.* Such a Man is under a moral Incapacity of perceiving Truth, as he that obstinately shuts his Eyes, is of perceiving Light. Every Prejudice, every Attachment to his Interest, his Passions, his Vanity, or his Pride, is a Step to a total Eclipse of the Understanding, to a judicial Blindness, and hardness of Heart. The Soul must be in earnest, and sincerely resolve not to be wanting to it self, in a due and proper Use of all the necessary Means, that God and Nature have pointed out, in order to obtain the End proposed.

X. The second Disposition is *Industry*, which will oblige a Man steadily and patiently to pursue the appointed Means. Truth is not to be found by the Lazy and Indolent, she flies from the Sluggard, and will be found only by those who diligently seek her; *who seek for her as for Silver, and search for her as for hid Treasures.* This is the necessary, the only Method of attaining to any particular Art or Science, whether Mathematicks, Philosophy or Languages. That a Man cannot be taught against his Will is certain, and tho' his Inclination be good, yet if he be either too volatile to fix his Attention, or too lazy or negligent, to go thro' the

the necessary Rudiments and Forms of Instructions, it is morally impossible he should ever make any Progress, much less arrive at any Perfection. The Child that will not, or cannot be taught his Alphabet, can never be taught the Use of it. A young Well-wisher to the Mathematicks, that will not first learn the plain Definition of Points, Lines, Figures, and Dimensions, can never be taught the Use of them; and though he should proceed so far, but through Laziness, and want of application, will proceed no further, he will be as great a Stranger to mathematical Learning, as unable to apprehend the Force or Use of a Demonstration, as he that has never known any Thing of the Matter.

XI. Let us now suppose one of these superficial Smatterers, who has just Learning enough, to distinguish a Point from a Line, a Circle from a Triangle; let us suppose such a one, hearing some of the great Genius's of the last, or present Age, talking over the stupendous Discoveries they have made in the Secrets of Nature: This would be all Jargon, (or if you please Mystery) to him. Let us suppose him to have a much better Estate than all of them together, and a handsomer Face than any of 'em; allow him to be a Youth of Fire and Vivacity, a ready Speaker, full of Wit and Repartee, a Favourite of all the merry Fellows, and the Darling of the Ladies, and in a Word, *a very pretty Gentleman*. Upon the Merit of all these Accomplishments, let us suppose him, with a polite Sneer, despising them as a Pack of queer out o' the Way Mortals, and magisterially declaring



claring, that all that they have been saying, is nothing but downright Jargon and mystical Nonsense; should they gravely reply to him, that they can demonstrate every Thing they have said to be true, and vouchsafe to give him a Demonstration of any one thing he has been pleas'd to call in question, the Force of which, he for want of Genius or Learning cannot apprehend. He has nothing further to say, but that it is against his *Reason*; that his *Reason*, which is as good as theirs, tells him to the contrary; that his *Reason* is to be his Guide, and that no Man's Authority shall persuade him to believe any thing contrary to it; that he has as good a Right to judge for himself, as they have, and that therefore he will never pin his Faith upon their Sleeves, (according to the Cant of our Free-Thinkers.) As for them, they may possibly thro' Prejudice of Education, believe what they say to be true, or else, that for some By-Ends of their own, to procure and enjoy good Salaries, annexed to Professorships, or to maintain a fancy'd Superiority over their Betters, they may impose upon them, what they do not believe themselves. What Treatment, can we imagine, such a Pretender to Reason and Freedom of Thought would deserve? Surely not to be seriously dealt with, but to be considered as a Child or an Idiot, and treated accordingly, with Pity and Contempt.

XII. As ridiculous and unreasonable as this Supposition may appear, yet it is exactly Parallel to the Bulk of those among us, who profess

fess themselves the only Patrons of Reason, and distinguish themselves from the rest of Mankind, as a herd of Priest-ridden Bigots, by the Style and Title of Free Thinkers in Religion: Which considered as a Science, or the Knowledge of divine Truth, must be learnt by the same Method, the same Progression from Definitions, to first Principles or Axioms, and thence to Conclusions, as other Sciences are. The same sincere Desire to be taught, the same Freedom from Prejudices, the same Industry and Application, the same Ingenuity of Temper, and readiness to receive and submit to proper Evidence, are required to apprehend and judge of divine Truths, as of those in Mathematicks and Philosophy. He therefore, who pretends to apply himself to these Enquiries, without these necessary Dispositions, may be ever Learning, and never come to the Knowledge of the Truth. The Man whose Heart is wedded to his Lusts, who is attached to some darling Sin, who is fond of some gainful Error, which he is unwilling to have detected and exposed, has bribed his Judgment beforehand, not to believe any Evidence that makes against him. Like a corrupt Judge, or a partial Jury, they determine before they hear the Merits of the Cause, *etiamsi persuadebis, non tamen persuaseris*. They resolve never to believe any Doctrine to be true, which they could wish to be false. Here we have a young Libertine entered early into the fashionable Vices of the Age, to which he entirely devotes his Hours of Leisure and Pleasure; he has, perhaps, an Ambition

to

to shine in a Court, or to make a considerable Figure in a Party, is bent upon raising his Fortune, and acquiring Posts and Titles of Honour; or if he has not this Ambition, he is perhaps fond of the *beau Monde*, has his Heart set upon the Vanity of Dress, Gallantry, and Equipage, delights in Intrigue, and piques himself upon being well with the Ladies and Men of Pleasure. A Man under these Engagements, and Circumstances of Life, can find no Leisure to enter into abstracted Notions, that require much Thought, give him many Pangs, and interrupt the professed Business of his Life. But because Atheism has an ungenteel, unfashionable Sound, and his Conscience, whenever it is consulted, tells him there must be something in that Word Religion, which the World has been so long disputing about; he therefore takes up some few undeniable first Principles, which he finds are not to be disputed, and from them draws a few undigested Consequences of his own, and forms a little System of Truth, as he calls it, that may neither disturb his Pleasures, nor interfere with his Interest, which he defends by little sophistical Arts of wrangling, which he and his Brethren call Reasoning. Should he by chance under the qualms of a Debauch, a fit of the Spleen, some little Mortifications of Sickness, Losses or Disappointments, for want of Company, or something to do, give himself leave to read in that old Book *the Bible*; he there finds certain four old fashion'd Precepts, that forbid him the irregular Gratifications of some warm Appetites he



has about him, the Pursuit of several Objects which he has in view ; there he finds strange Stories of a *future Judgment, a World to come, an Eternity of Happiness and Misery*, as the Reward and Punishment of certain Things done in the Flesh. These startle him and disturb his Quiet, he fears the Event, but hopes it may not be true ; with this View he reads, to find if he can discover in this Book, any Marks of Falshood, any thing that looks incredible, that is inconsistent with his Reason. And when he finds accounts of certain Miracles, that surpass his Understanding, and puzzle his Reason, and certain Truths required to be believed, which he can see no reason for, he immediately concludes without more ado, that this is all Cheat and Imposture ; and since both the Precepts and Doctrines are all in the same Book, he concludes they must be all of the same Stamp, and therefore rejects the whole, recovers his former Tranquillity, and from thenceforth commences *Free-Thinker*. Like my young Mathematician, who before he had gone thro' the First Book of *Euclid*, should meet with Bishop *Wilkin's* Mathematical Magick, in which he should find several amazing Things, which vastly surpass his Understanding, and seem contrary to what he calls his *Reason* ; he therefore stops short, throws away his Book, pronounces all to be Nonsense and Absurdity, and that the Professors are a pack of Cheats combined together, to abuse honest Gentlemen, and make them renounce their *Reason* ; which, as a true *British Protestant* he resolves to maintain, and assert the  
Right

Right of his *private Judgment*, against all Arbitrary and tyrannical Impositions whatsoever.

XIII. And here I appeal to these Patrons of Reason, and Free-Thinking, I desire them to knock at their Consciences, if they are not past feeling, and ask them ingenuously whether this be not their Care; whether the true Reason of their profess'd Opposition to Religion, be not (what Mr. *Hobbs* long ago confess'd) because Religion is against them. Do they ever retire from the World, and think seriously of those Truths which they oppose? Do they ever take half the Pains to examine the Grounds of any one Principle in Religion, as to understand their several Professions, to make their Fortunes, or to manage an Intrigue? Is not their whole time divided betwixt their Business and their Pleasure? Or rather, is not Pleasure the great Business of their Lives? How else comes it to pass, that several very pretty Gentlemen take upon them to ridicule the Scriptures, who are not able to read a Chapter in them; and to charge them with Contradictions, without being able to explain or spell that very hard Word: Who yet can talk well of the Business of the World, Politicks, Campaigns, military Discipline, Dress, Masquerades, the Park, the Play-House and the Drawing-Room: Who can write a clean *billet doux*, sing a French Song with a good manner, and dance with a very good Air. These are not the Diversions, but the whole Business, the Employment of most of the gay Youth about this great Town, who take some Part of *Solomon's* Ad-

*vice, They rejoyce in their Youth, and let their Hearts cheer them in the Days of their Youth, they walk in the Ways of their Heart, and the Sight of their Eyes; but they consider not, that for all these Things God will bring them into Judgment, neither indeed is God in all their Thoughts.*

XIV. Ay, but say they, we have among us, Men of Gravity and Morality, Sobriety and Temperance; Men that have out-lived the Violence of their youthful Passions, who therefore have Leisure to think calmly and rationally of these Matters, and who talk soberly and deliberately; not in the Heat of Passion, or over a Bottle, but over a grave Pipe, and a Dish of Coffee. This is very true, and I myself have the Honour to be acquainted with a whole Clan of them, who meet regularly at certain Seasons, for the Propagation of Infidelity and Freedom of Thought; and as good a Reason may be given for their Ignorance in Religion, as in Opticks or Navigation; in short, they never learnt it, nor ever thought seriously about it. Many of them, 'tis true, are sober Men, for they dare not be otherwise; most of them have contracted some genteel Infirmities from the Sins of their Youth, which keep them in some Sort of Decency; they have heard, and know not but it may be true, that there is a Judgment to come, and an eternal Life of Happiness and Misery after this, and knowing that their Health depends upon their Regularity, they are very careful to keep on this Side the Grave, not knowing  
what



what may be on the other: In one Word, the Result of my Observations upon these, and some other odd Characters that have fallen in my Way, is this, that I never yet met with an old Unbeliever, who was not also an old Sinner.

XV. But supposing that there are some amongst them, whose Prejudices are not so deeply rooted, who have Capacity and Ingenuity enough to receive Instruction, and enter fairly into a Thread of impartial Reasoning. I shall therefore, in the next Place, endeavour to shew, that there is nothing in Religion, either Natural or Revealed, contrary to Reason, nothing that contradicts the Nature and Truth of Things. As for the chief Heads of natural Religion; such as the Existence of a God, the Immortality of the Soul, and a future State; I do not remember ever to have heard them openly oppos'd upon the Foot of Reason, tho' sometimes slyly banter'd, by Men, who if they had imagined, that any thing that had the Face of Reason, could have been urged against them, would not have failed to have done it; I shall therefore take them for granted, till I hear they are disputed. The necessary Duties of Obedience, Purity, Prayer, &c. due to a Being of infinite Goodness and Perfection, which are imply'd in the natural *Idea* we have of God, follow by plain and undeniable Consequence. The Duties of Humanity, Justice, and Mercy to one another, as Creatures of the same God, and Partakers of the same common Nature, cannot be denied to be entirely agreeable and consistent with *common Reason*.

Whence

Whence the ancient Moralists of the heathen World, *Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Tully, &c.* first discovered them, and taught them as the necessary Result of *Right Reason*. But the Difficulty that puzzles them most, is the Business of Revealed Religion. Before I enter upon this Part of the Question, I beg leave to lay down these few *Postulata*, which I have already supposed will be granted without farther Proof, by every impartial *Reasoner*, and *Free-Thinker*, (as for the Patrons of the *Pantheistick* Scheme, they are at present out of the Question.)

1. That there is a God.
2. That this God is a Being of infinite Goodness, Wisdom, and Power.
3. That this God made all Things.
4. That Man was created Immortal.

If these *Postulata* be not contrary to *Reason*, or the Nature of Things, as I am sure it is demonstrable they are not; I shall from thence undertake to prove, as briefly as possible, that there is nothing in the Books of the Old and New Testament contrary to *Reason*, i. e. in plainer Words, there is nothing in them that contradicts the common and obvious Notions of Truth; that there is no Absurdity, like what we in other Cases agree to call a Contradiction; such as, that the Part is greater than the Whole; that the same Proposition, in the same Sense, and in the same Respect, can be true and false

at

at the same Time; that two and three are not equal to five, and such like.

XVI. If God be a Being of infinite Goodness, and created Man to live for ever, he certainly designed him to be happy for ever; for to create him for eternal Misery would be inconsistent with infinite Goodness. This Happiness must be the Result and Reward of Obedience, because the Happiness of a Creature must depend upon the Favour and Protection of its first Cause. If the Happiness of a Creature, depend upon the Favour of its Creator, it is highly reasonable, that it should know the Will of its Creator, and the Terms of Obedience required of it, that it might know how to serve him, and obey him as it ought to do; and by consequence, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he would, being infinitely Good, and that he could, being infinitely Wise and Powerful, reveal his Will to them, by some Means or other, that they might know it and do it; and that what he would do, and could do, he certainly has done, is highly agreeable to *Reason*, that they may be without Excuse, who are punished for their Disobedience. That the Books which we call the Holy Scripture, are that Will of God revealed to Mankind, is not contrary to *Reason*, because there is nothing in the Books themselves that contradicts *Reason*. I do not here pretend to enter into the positive Proofs of the Excellency and Divinity of those Holy Books, which has been admirably and justly done by many able Writers, both Ancient and Modern; nor to explain by Reason,

the



the several sublime Truths comprehended in them, that is not my present Design; I am only to show these Men of *Reason*, that they are not affected by their Prejudices against them, that there are none of these Absurdities and Contradictions to be found there, which they weakly and wickedly imagine, and when they are once convinced of this, the Way will be clear to demonstrate the positive Excellency of those Holy Books, and their Preference, not only to the Light of Nature, but to all other pretended Revelations or Doctrines whatsoever.

XVII. To Evince this, I shall consider the Holy Scripture :

1. With regard to its History.
2. Its Miracles.
3. Its Precepts.
4. Its Mysteries.

1. The first Difficulty that occurs in the History of Scripture, is, that of the Creation and Fall of Man. And in this there appears nothing contrary to *Reason*. That a God of infinite Power should create a Being in his own Image to partake of all his communicable Attributes and Perfections is so far from being contrary to *Reason*, that it would be a Contradiction to assert the contrary : for that would be to suppose his Power infinite, and limited at the same time. Besides, since there are such Creatures in the World, whence had they their Beginning, but from the creating Power of the Almighty ? To say

ay that they created themselves, would be contrary to *Reason*. For the same Being cannot be the Cause and Effect of it self; and to say that they existed from all Eternity, would be to make them Gods, and not Creatures. But then we are told, that Man was created much more happy and perfect, than we see him at present, and that by his Transgression of the Commands of his Maker, he forfeited and lost this Happiness for himself and his Posterity; and pray what is there in this contrary to *Reason*: For it is not my present Business to account for the *Reason* of it, or reconcile it to *Reason*, that is another Province. Is it any Contradiction to suppose that God could make a Creature, and endue him with Freedom of Will, and put him into a happy State of Probation, which he might secure to himself and his Posterity, by his Obedience, or forfeit by the Abuse of his Liberty? Is not Dependence included in the very Idea of a Creature? Does not Dependence of any Creature, in its natural State, suppose Infirmary, Mutability, or a possibility of falling or changing? Surely there is no Absurdity in this; but to assert the contrary, is a direct Contradiction in Terms. But say they, *Adam* not only forfeited for himself, but for all his Posterity. The Children that were yet unborn are punished, though guiltless, for the Transgressions of their first Parents; which seems highly unjust and unreasonable. To this it may be answered, that without all question, *Adam* knew the Consequence of his Transgression, that it would affect his

D

Posterity,

Posterity, whose relation to him, is perhaps deeper and more intimate, than the common Philosophy concerning the Origin of Souls, is apt to suppose: Why, therefore, is it more absurd to suppose, that a Parent who knows that the Happiness of his Posterity, as well as his own, depends upon certain Terms of Obedience, should, by violating those Laws, involve himself and them in Condemnation; than that an extravagant Father, by carelessly spending a good Estate, may leave his Children Beggars: Or that by breaking and debauching a good Constitution, by Lewdness and Intemperance, he may so weaken the *Stamina vite*, and corrupt the seminal Principles, as to entail an Hereditary *Lues* upon his latest Posterity. In short, so intimate is the Relation, so close the Dependence between us and our first Parents, that in the natural Course and Order of Things, (without supposing any judicial Guilt imputed to us by God) it is no more unreasonable to suppose, that the Posterity of *Adam* should be infected by his Fall, than that a four Fountain should send forth four Waters; or that a Crab-Tree should produce four Fruit, *for who can bring a clean Thing out of Unclean?* And that this is the Case of all the Sons of *Adam*, that they are at present in a fallen corrupt State, that all the Faculties and Powers of their Souls and Bodies are enfeebled, and sunk below the original Perfection, in which their first Parent was created, and for which they were designed, is more than probable; if we consider the Relation to their Creator, God  
blessed



blessed for evermore, infinitely Wise, Just, and Good, Who could have no other Inducement to create Man; but the overflowings of his infinite Goodness; who therefore, doubtless, created him in such Perfection, and with such Abilities, that nothing but his own Fault could make him miserable. Can we conceive, that a Creature could come out of the Hands of an infinitely Powerful, Wise, and good Creator, so miserable, so helpless, so ignorant as we see him at present! The Free-Thinkers in the heathen World thought otherwise, who though they had no explicit Notion of such a Lapse, as the Holy Scriptures mention, yet concluded we were in a preternatural imperfect State, and asserted the Necessity of divine Assistance, to bring us to that Pitch of Wisdom, Virtue, and Happiness, which is the proper Perfection of our Natures: And can we imagine, that he who made us, gave us not that proper Perfection, and all the Helps and Assistances, that were necessary to secure and preserve it, except immutability? Which is contradictory to the Idea of a Creature, that he should be left at Liberty to chuse the Good, and refuse the Evil, seems highly agreeable to *Reason*, that his Obedience might be more rational, and his Service more meritorious. *Plato* in his *Alcibiades* talks so feelingly of human Ignorance and Infirmities, and of the Necessity of a Director from Heaven, to teach us the true Nature of Prayer and Devotion; that some learned Men have concluded he thereby bore Testimony to the Fall of Man, and the Necessity of a Saviour to restore him. From

this Notion came all their moral Philosophy, which was intended to improve and perfect their Nature; hence all their Laws about Civil Government, and all their other Arts of Politeness or Necessity, were ascribed to some divine Powers, who enlightned human Ignorance, and strengthened their Infirmities. Thus *Numa* had his *Egeria*, *Lycurgus* his divine Director, and *Socrates* his *Demon*, and all the Poets their respective Deities, who at once inspired and governed the Poetick Flame; by all this confessing the Impotence and Ignorance of human Nature, and the Necessity of having Recourse to some superior Light to guide us into the Way of Truth, and some greater Power than our own, to enable us to follow its Direction. Not to say that the Doctrine of the Pre-existence of Souls, which was that of the *Pythagorick* and *Platonick* Schools, as well as the *Chaldaick* and *Aegyptian*, from whence theirs was derived, is in Effect the very same Doctrine which the Holy Scripture has more plainly taught,

XVIII. The next Difficulty in Scripture History, is *Noah's Flood*. Here they cavil again, and cannot reconcile to their Reason, that immense Quantity of Waters that covered the Face of the Earth, nor imagine whence they came; But what is this to the Purpose? There is no Absurdity, no Contradiction to suppose, that he who made the World, and commands all the Powers of Nature, could from many secret and unknown Reservoirs, bring Water enough to destroy a disobedient People. As for the other  
Parts

Parts of Holy Story, the Destruction of *Sodom*, the Adventures of the Patriarchs, the giving of the Law, the History of the Judges and Kings of *Israel* and *Judah*, the several Captivities and Restorations of the *Jews*; they stand upon the same Foot of Evidence and Credibility that other prophane History does. The Expedition of *Xerxes*, *Alexander* and *Julius Cæsar*, are as incredible as any of these. But as I am very sensible their Spleen is not so much directed against the Series of historical Facts, as against the wonderful and miraculous Circumstances that are intermixt with them; I shall therefore proceed,

XIX. 2. To the Miracles recorded in Holy Scripture; these being only Circumstances of certain Facts recorded and well attested, must have the same Degree of Credibility with the Facts themselves: That the Facts are as well attested as any Part of prophane Story, will (I presume) not be question'd by any one, who has read and consider'd Mr. *Lesly's Short-Method with the Deists*. And why the Circumstances should be disputed as incredible and unreasonable, I cannot see: In short, let our Adversaries produce one miraculous Story in Scripture, that contradicts the Nature of Things, or that Omnipotence cannot produce; and we will then undertake a particular Proof of it. Nor can this be thought evading the Question; for when they ask, how can these Things be? How are these wonderful and supernatural Effects to be accounted for? I freely answer, I cannot tell: We know not the  
several



several Springs and Powers, even of created Nature; we are unacquainted with the distinct Properties of the several Classes of Beings, and therefore cannot tell how far they are capable of acting. But this we know, that they are all in the Hand of God, who can suspend the ordinary Laws of Nature, and alter their several Courses whensoever it pleases him; and this is to a demonstration certain, that to a Being of infinite Power, nothing is impossible. I come now to

XX. 3. The doctrinal Precepts of Scripture. And here I expect to be immediately ask'd, to what purpose did God ordain the several bloody and costly Sacrifices of the Jewish Church, so many Festivals, the painful Rite of Circumcision, and in short, the whole Yoak of Jewish Ceremonies; a Burden so great, that even St. *Paul* himself pronounces, that neither they, nor their Fathers were able to bear them? To this again, I answer, (*as a Man of Reason*) I cannot tell. Who knows so well the particular Circumstances of that People, or the secret and unsearchable Designs of Providence, in the Institution of them; as to pretend to explain the particular *Reasons* of all or either of them? But is it contrary to *Reason* that they should be so ordained? Had they not been commanded from Heaven, it is not very probable they would have submitted to them. To this I expect it will be replied, that that was nothing more than Priestcraft, the *lucrative Inventions* of cunning Priests to enslave the People, and grow Fat upon their Oblations; That this has been an old Trick

Trick among *Priests of all Religions*. The *Talapains*, the *Dervizes*, and the whole Catalogue of Mr. Toland's *holy Cheats*. But pray, Gentlemen, consider that the Command of Circumcision was given to an honest old Country Gentleman 430 Years before any legal Priesthood was established, one that was so far from having any Design to impose upon the World, or put Mankind to any unnecessary Pain or Expence, that he practised upon no Body but himself and Family: He, though 99 Years of Age, submitted to the painful Operation, which one would think he should never have done, without a very good Reason: Nor could he have the least Hope or Intention, of making Profelytes to so bloody an Institution, or making himself the Head and Director of a Party, by this means, since he was not in his own Country, among his own Friends and Dependants, who might possibly have been influenced by his Authority or Example; but he was in a strange Country, among a polite *Free-thinking People*; and tho' we read indeed, that the *Sichemites* submitted to it, yet it was not upon a religious View: but they did it by the Persuasion of their Prince, to oblige his amorous Son and Heir, and to encourage that honest laborious People to live and settle among them. As for the Business of Sacrifices, they were so far from being the Contrivance of the Priests, that it is easy to trace their Antiquity to the very Time of *Adam's Fall*. Dr. Cave conjectures, that the Eucharistical Oblation of the Fruits of the Earth, might be used in the Times

of

of Innocence, and that it was the Dictate of pure natural Gratitude; and Men so well versed in History and polite Learning, as our Adversaries would be thought to be, would do well to shew us any civilized Nation, that did not offer Sacrifices to their respective Deities. They cannot but know, that there was as much *Reason* and good Sense, as much Politeness, and Freedom of Thought, in ancient *Greece* and *Rome*, as at present in *Great-Britain*; yet that this, amongst other Instances of religious Worship, was known to be a constant Part of their Devotion. As for Times and Places peculiarly appropriated to the several Parts of religious Worship, they are such necessary Circumstances, that he must have a very particular Sort of *Reason*, who can separate the one from the other. If we come now to the judicial Precepts, we shall be so far from finding there any thing contrary to *Reason*, that, on the other hand, the greatest Part of them, (not to say the whole) seem to be founded on the strictest and most obvious Notions of natural Justice and Equity: Such were the Laws about *Servants*, *Manslaughter*, *cursing of Parents*, *Theft*, *Damage*, *Trespases*, *Borrowing*, *Fornication*, &c. As for the moral Precepts included in the Ten Commandments; and that fuller Explanation of them given by our Blessed Lord in his Sermon on the Mount; I do not remember that ever I have heard them charged with Unreasonableness or Absurdity, and therefore shall take it for granted they are not.



XXI. 4. But the greatest Difficulty is still behind; and that is the *Mysteries* of the Gospel, certain unintelligible Doctrines, imposed upon us as Articles of Faith, which no mortal Man can explain or comprehend; and yet we are told, that these are necessary to be believed in order to Salvation, which seems very absurd and unreasonable. And here I must premise a very necessary Distinction, tho' very much exploded by some late Scribblers, betwixt being *above our Reason*, and *contrary to it*. The shortness and weakness of our Understandings, cannot comprehend or explain many Things that are sensibly and demonstrably certain; but no Man sure will be so weak as to disbelieve his Senses, and deny the Certainty of several Effects in Nature, because he cannot explain their several Causes, nor the exact Method, Reason, and Manner of their Production. Let this be granted, and then let us see whether our Patrons of Reason must not disdain their Senses, as well as their Faith, if they resolve to believe nothing, of which they have not adequate Ideas; the necessary Modes and Relations of which, they cannot explain. What adequate Idea have these Gentlemen of Matter? What is the Essence of it? They tell you, *it is an extended impenetrable Substance, having Parts without Parts*. Well, but all this while we apprehend nothing by this Definition, but a congeries of Accidents and Qualities, such as *Extension, Impenetrability, &c.* but what is the Subject, the *Substratum* of these Accidents? What is the Subject to which these Predicates

E belong?

belong? What is the naked Essence of Matter, stript of all its Accidents, which tho' inseparable in Fact, may, one would think, be distinguished in the Understanding? And one would be apt to imagine, that any Idea short of this, were inadequate and imperfect\*; but does any one doubt of its Existence? Do we not Discourse, Reason and Judge about it? And in short, our Notions of Spirit, are as obscure and inadequate, as those of Matter; about which, however, we argue and draw Consequences, with as much Certainty, as from any other Subject or Matter of Science.

XXII. The first and great Myſtery, which is at present the Stumbling Block of our Rational Men, is that of the Holy Undivided Trinity: Three Co-essential, Co-eternal Persons, subsisting in the same Essence. This they say, is a Contradiction, that *One* should be *Three*, and *Three* should be *One*. And so it would indeed, if they should be the same in the same respect; but what the Holy Scripture asserts, is, that they are *Three* in Person, and but *One* in Essence. This we pretend no more to comprehend or explain than they do; for how can a finite Nature, comprehend what is infinite: But we assert, that in this Account of the Holy Trinity, there is no Absurdity, no Contradiction to the Truth or Nature of Things. That the Father is particularly considered, as the eternal Spring and Fountain of the Divinity: That the Son is generated of him, by a necessa-

---

\* This Mr. Lock affirms, Book 2. c. 31. §. 8. *Hum. Underst.*

ry and eternal *Generation*: That the Holy Spirit proceeds from both, by a necessary and eternal *Procession*: So that no Time can be conceived, when the Father was without the Son and Holy Ghost. And though there be a sort of Subordination implied in the Generation of the one, and the Procession of the other; yet it is not inconsistent with that co-essential Equality which we maintain between the Persons in the Godhead. And this may be illustrated by several Truths in Nature, that bear a kind of Resemblance to it. Could we suppose the *Sun* to be Eternal, we must suppose its Light and Heat to be Eternal, being both co-essential, and co-eternal with the *Sun*, the proper and necessary Parent and Fountain of them both: These are to be considered subordinate, as Cause and Effects, though not properly produced by the Agency or Efficiency of a Pre-existent Being, but what the Schools call *Emanative*, whose Effects necessarily proceed from, and co-exist with their Cause: So that though they be subordinate, yet they are co-essential and co-eternal. The human Soul is also a remote Copy and Emblem of the Holy Trinity; the Foundation of which is Life or Existence, which cannot be conceived without the co-existent essential Powers, Properties, or what you please of *Understanding* or *Light*, and of the *Will* or *Love*. The one answering to *the Father*, the other to *the Son*, and the third to the *Holy-Ghost*. Though we pretend not to explain this Mystery, but to vindicate it from the Charge of Absurdity and Contradiction.



XXIII. The next Difficulty is the Incarnation of the Blessed *Jesus*. Which was done, not by Conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God : This they cannot apprehend, they understand not the Nature of this Union, and therefore reject it as contrary to *Reason*. But let them explain to me the Union of their own Souls and Bodies: Let them explain to me by what Ligament, two Substances of so different Natures are united, and the Nature and Reason of those Laws of Union by which they act upon each other. Yea, let them explain to me, what that Cement or Ligament is, that unites the several Parts that compose their own Bodies, or the vilest Part of Matter; but these are Subjects of the most common and ordinary Experience, the Influence of Body and Soul upon each other, is what we every Moment feel and perceive; and when these Difficulties are explained, we will undertake to solve the other.

XXIV. The last Difficulty I shall mention upon this Head, shall be that of the *Resurrection* of the Body; which has given great Offence to our Free-thinking Gentlemen, who make as great a Mock at it, as their Predecessors of the *Epicurean* Sect did, when St. *Paul* preached it at *Athens*, Acts xvii. 18. It is, they say, contrary to *Reason*, that a Body after it has rotted in the Earth, and undergone a thousand Changes of its Texture and Situation, should be again restored to its primitive Form, and have all its scatter'd Atoms reduced to their proper Place. To this I answer in general, *that with God all Things are possible.*

*possible.* But if I am particularly pressed to explain the Nature and Mode of the Resurrection, and wherein the Identity of this Resurrection Body shall consist: I answer, I cannot tell. But that there shall be a Resurrection of this mortal and corruptible Body, in such a Sense, as that it shall be properly *the same Body*, that was once united to every particular Soul, is not at all contrary to *Reason*. But if I am asked, How are the Dead raised up, and with what Body do they come? I answer with St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. *Thou Fool, that which thou sowest is not quicken'd except it die. And what thou sowest, thou sowest not that Body that shall be but bare Grain; it may chance of Wheat, or of some other Grain. But God giveth it a Body as it hath pleased him, and to every Seed its own Body.* And when they can give us a rational and philosophical Account, of the Resurrection of a Seed sown in the Earth, which yet is the Object of every Day's Experience, then will I be bound to account for the *Reason* and *Philosophy* of the Resurrection Body.

XXV. If I have with any Degree of Success, vindicated the Holy Scriptures from the Charge of Absurdity and Contradiction in the main Points and Articles of Truth: It will then follow, that there is at least a Possibility of their being true. And if there be so, it is of the last Consequence to every Man, to enquire whether they are actually so or not; and this Enquiry must be made with a Vigour, a Zeal, an Earnestness equal to the Importance and Dignity of the Subject; which

which is no less than an Eternity of Happiness or Misery, reserved for us in another World, as the Consequence of our good or bad Behaviour in this. *Eternal Life, an incorruptible Inheritance, a never-fading Crown of Glory, everlasting Happiness,* are Subjects so transcendently great and valuable, that one would think the Promise of them should awaken the most drowsy Soul; encourage and quicken the most Indolent, to enquire into the Authority on which these Promises are grounded, and know and practise the several Terms on which they may be obtained. Consider, Gentlemen! with what indefatigable Zeal, with what amazing Application, even the most Lazy and Tender of you, lately pursued imaginary Treasures in the *South-Sea*. How many sleepless Nights, and restless Days you spent in a vain Pursuit of Bubbles: Your *Reason* that boasted Privilege of a true-born Briton, was rejected as useless; it boggled not at a *Mystery* of Iniquity, which the very wisest of you own'd you could not comprehend. All your Conversation run upon *Stocks, first and second Subscriptions, Difference,* and a Number of pedantick Phrases, coined in the Alley, and adjacent Coffee-houses, in defiance of that Politeness of Language and Behaviour, that you at other times profess. How did you give up your Understandings, and sacrifice your Fortunes to Directors, Stock-Jobbers, Brokers and Pick-pockets, upon a distant, uncertain, precarious Hope of raising your Fortunes, and flourishing a little while, in the Eyes of the unthinking Multitude?



titude? Now suppose any new Project should  
 be started, any fresh Scheme, full of advantagi-  
 ous Proposals should be set on Foot; ask your  
 selves the Question, would you not patiently  
 read them, and consider the Terms proposed?  
 Would you not compute and calculate, and call  
 in the Assistance of some Friend learned in Arith-  
 metick, and skilful in the Mysteries of 'Change-  
 Alley, to advise and direct you, whether there  
 was any Proportion betwixt the Hazard of Lo-  
 sing, and Hopes of Getting? I know you would.  
 Come then, do the same Thing in the Affair of  
 Religion, sit down and consider calmly the Pro-  
 posals offered to you, if you are a little puzzled,  
 as it is likely you may, in a Subject so much out  
 of your Way: Consult those who are more con-  
 versant in such sort of Affairs. *Parsons* I know  
 you despise, but chuse the best you can meet  
 with; I will answer for it, you have as fair a  
 Chance, to meet with a Man of Understanding  
 and Probity among them, as at the *South-Sea*  
 House, or the Bank of *England*, and give him  
 not so much Credit, nor so much implicit Faith,  
 as you would your Broker; he does not desire it,  
 nor does the Cause need it. He will tell you,  
 what is demonstrably certain, that Religion pro-  
 poses the Reversion of everlasting Glory and  
 Happiness in the World to come; all that you  
 are required to subscribe, is, a Desire to be hap-  
 py, to renounce certain uneasy Lusts, base Ap-  
 petites, scandalous Vices, which are so far from  
 being any Part of our worldly Happiness, that  
 they are the Seeds and Fountains of Shame, Sick-  
 ness

ness, Pain, Poverty, Misery, and Death. I presume you are a little surprized at this strange Proposal, and desire Time to think upon it, as *Felix* did, when *St. Paul* reasoned with him about a Judgment to come.

XXVI. I will now suppose, (for Arguments sake) that any one of you is resolved in good earnest, to inquire impartially into this Affair; to read seriously the Proposals laid down in the Holy Scripture, with a zealous Resolution to learn and practise his Duty. To this Man I propose, in the first Place, a punctual and regular Observation of the moral Duties of natural Religion, with Regard to God, himself, and his Neighbour. Let him subdue and regulate his disorderly Appetites, be free from Prejudices, renounce all his Vices; and in a Word, live up to the Dictates of natural Conscience.

*Virtus est vitium fugere & Sapientia prima est Stultitiâ caruisse.* —

These are as necessary Preparations for the Understanding the Nature of evangelical Obedience, Truth, and Holiness, as skill in *Architecture* would be to understand the Structure of *Noah's Ark*, or *Solomon's Temple*; *Geography* to determine the Situation and Distance of Places; *Chronology* to settle the several Periods of History; *Grammar* to understand the Construction of Sentences; and *Languages* to form a critical Judgment of the Text. And without such previous preparative Knowledge, every Part

the aforefaid Arts and Sciences, will be myfterious and unintelligible to the unlearned Reader; as much as the Doctrine of *Asymptots*, (*i.e.* Lines alway mutually inclining, and never coinciding) would be to a young Mathematician, though demonstrable by the Learned in that Science, as much as any other Proposition in *Euclid*. The Evidence proper to evince any Truth, answers to the Medium in Vision, and must be proportion'd to the Nature of the Object to be perceived, or the Truth to be explain'd and understood. And this Evidence or Medium is as different, as the several Sorts of Truths to be apprehended: Historical Evidence is quite different from Mathematical, and Mathematical from Moral; the Evidence of *Sense* is different from that of *Reason*, and that of *Reason* distinct from that of *Faith*. To call therefore for Demonstration, clear and adequate Ideas, &c. in Articles of Faith, is as absurd, as it would be in Matters of Fact or Sense; which, tho' it may appear a little surprizing, I shall endeavour to explain more fully by and by.

XXVII. Let the Man then, that resolves to use his *Reason*, and think freely, put himself into this proper and necessary Disposition of Head and Heart. Let him discharge his Wenches, and if he cannot contain, let him marry and live soberly. Let him act justly and honourably with all Mankind, spend his Evenings with Men of Virtue and Honour, go to Bed sober, and not forget to say his Prayers Morning and Evening. Let him lay aside his stupid Prejudices against

F

the



the Parson, and give him at least as much Credit, as he does his *Lawyer* and his *Physician*. And then in God's Name, let him use his *Reason*. Let him think as freely as he pleases, and we will join issue with him, and follow this Guide, so far as it will lead us. Let him examine every Truth, every Proposition, with the nicest Criticism, the severest Scrutiny. This Prescription to make a good Free-Thinker, is as old as *Pythagoras*, who himself was one, which for the Sake of some pretty Gentlemen, I shall translate into *English*, out of his Golden Verses. "Be thou, says he, "temperate in eating, drinking, and Diversions. "Never close thine Eyes to sleep, till thou hast "thrice examined the Behaviour of the past "Day, begging Pardon of God for thine Offences, and giving him Thanks if thou hast done "well. Let this be done with Industry, Diligence, and Zeal, and this will infallibly lead "thee into the Paths of divine Virtue. Add to "this, fervent Prayer to God, who will so enlighten thee, that thou shalt see and know the "mysterious Secrets of God and Nature". This is a strange Recipe to the Generality of our young Gentry, whose Heads are too full of the Gayeties of Life, *Balls*, *Masquerades*, *Ombre*, *Basset*, *Assignations*, *Billet doux*, &c. to enter seriously and heartily, into such a Method of Learning as this : But this they may depend upon, there is no other Way. In short let them use the same Means, with the same Industry and Zeal, that they would to understand any other Art or Science, and the Success will be certain.

If

If he would enquire whether these Books, that compose the Canon of the Old and New Testament be genuine, let him give us the same fair Play, that he would any other prophane Writer : Let him candidly examine the proper Evidences, the credibility of Relators, and the Agreement of their Testimonies, and then let him pronounce, whether we have not in a critical Light, better Arguments for the Genuineness and Divinity of them, than of any other Book in the whole World. If he would judge of the Truth of one particular Fact, let him not be so unreasonable as to require more, or other sort of Evidence, than the Case requires, and the Nature of the Thing will admit of. If he would judge of the Doctrines and Precepts, let him fairly and calmly consult his Reason, with Regard to natural Morality, and the Nature and Extent of that Obligation ; and he will soon find, that all the Precepts of the Gospel, are only the Doctrines of natural Religion, improved, set in a clearer Light, enforced by higher Motives and nobler Rewards. But if he would judge of Miracles recorded, or Mysteries proposed in a Book, which has all the external Arguments to prove it genuine, that can be desired, let him be so candid, as not to wrangle and dispute, and call for different Evidence than what the Nature of the Thing will admit of ; but be satisfied, that whereas he thinks he should have Reason enough to believe the History, were it not for those Difficulties that are occasionally interspersed thro' it ; let him allow the same Evidence to have its

just Weight for both, if the one be owned not to exceed the Power of God, and the other not to contradict the established Nature and Truth of Things. Here is the true Notion and Use of *Reason* in Religion. A *Free-Thinker* in this Sense, is truly a Philosopher, a Lover of Truth, an Enemy to Bigotry and Superstition : Such were the Free-Thinkers of Old, the Patrons and Advocates of *Truth* or *Reason* in the Heathen World. *Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Plutarch, Tully, &c.* who with great Strength of *Reason* opposed the epidemical Vices and Errors of the Times they lived in : Men of large comprehensive Spirits, who from just Conceptions of the Nature of God and human Souls, from a due Consideration of the Frame and System of Nature, the regular Oeconomy of the World, and the Harmony and Beauty of Providence, raised such Systems of natural Religion, as effectually overturned all that Ignorance, Superstition and Idolatry, with which the World was at that Time overrun. These they boldly and courageously opposed, and hazarded even their Lives, (as *Socrates* in particular did) in defence of what they taught. Such were also the venerable Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors in the Christian Church ; who upon better Light, and nobler Principles, boldly taught, and defended, even unto Death, the Faith of Christ crucified, against the Errors and Idolatry of the Heathens, as well as the obstinate Blindness and Perverseness of the *Jews*. Such also were many of our first Reformers from Popery ; where Men had long been taught



taught to renounce their Reason, disbelieve their Senses, and blindly follow their Leaders with an implicit Obedience. This our Reformers broke through with a noble and undaunted Zeal; they translated the Scriptures into the vulgar Tongue, that the People might know and understand their Duty; they canvassed with great Ingenuity and Freedom of Thought, all the Articles of Faith, all the Canons, Constitutions, Rubricks, and Liturgies, and compared them with the Holy Scriptures, and most ancient Records of the Christian Church; and then separating the Chaff from the Wheat, the Precious from the Vile, they published to the World, the Grounds and Reasons upon which they acted, and so restored in a good Measure, the Truth from the Bondage of Corruption, and demonstrated the Christian Worship to be, what it really is, *a Reasonable Service*.

XXVIII. If our modern Free-Thinkers would act thus, they would discover themselves worthy of that honourable Appellation, which they vainly assume: Would they candidly, ingenuously, and impartially enquire after Truth, we would gladly join with them in their Enquiries. But their Case is quite contrary, they examine Truth, and reform the Errors of Mankind, with no more regularity, no better Design, than *Jack Cade*, *Wat Tyler*, or *Oliver Cromwell*, at the Head of an Army of Vagabonds, and Enthusiasts, attempted to reform the Abuses of Government, which they intended to subvert and destroy. Hence it comes to pass, that all their Pretences to Reason,

Reason, are mere Farce and Banter; their boasted Freedom of Thought, is errant Bigotry; some of the Bullies in the Party, never thought in their Lives; have no positive Notions of any Thing, but their Heads are stuffed with Scraps and Collections, out of certain vile libertine Authors, who have laboured in the Cause. I could not but smile the other Day, to hear one of these *Goliaths* defying the Armies of the Living God; who when he was attacked by a modest Gentleman that sat near him, and gave him close play, with clean Reasons and Arguments, being at a stand, scratched his Head, and wished for a better Memory, for that he had read the Answer to that Argument, but had really forgot it. In short, they are so far from reasoning calmly and dispassionately with us, that they attack us with Noise and Clamour: They raise the Passions of the *Posse*, by popular Cant and Declamation; and try to destroy by Force and Fraud, what they know can never be hurt, by a sober and rational Enquiry. The idle indigested Notion of Liberty, which has for some Years past, been the *Shibboleth* of a certain Set of weak Politicians and Reformers, seems to have laid us under a judicial thickness of Skull, and Hardness of Heart; and by that empty specious Sound we are deluded into the most slavish Absurdities, both in Politicks and Religion. And because the Clergy (some of them I mean) have still the Courage to assert the Truth, and bear their Testimony against the crying Dullness and Iniquity of

of these new Reformers, the Cry is therefore raised against them; in the first Place, *Gebal*, and *Ammon*, and *Amaleck*, the *Philistines*, with them that dwell at *Tyre*; Rakes, Libertines, Jews, Turks, Infidels, Hereticks, Schismaticks, Stock-Jobbers, Knaves and Fools are all united in this generous Design to oppose Priestcraft, suppress the Herd of Bigots, and settle the Empire of *Reason* upon the Ruins of *common Sense*. With this View, they are marked to be hunted down as a Set of turbulent seditious Mortals, Enemies to the publick Peace, Men that turn the World upside down: As a lazy Set of Men, who enjoy Stipends and Honours on purpose to mislead and abuse us, and domineer over our Understandings: As a parcel of Hypocrites, who practise in Secret, what they condemn in Publick, and do not believe themselves, what they propose to others as Articles of Faith. I wish I could reply to this, that the Charge is absolutely false: But let us, for Argument's Sake, suppose it to be in some measure true. But what then? Is there therefore no Foundation of Truth in Religion, are there no Men of Virtue, Learning and Integrity that profess to believe and defend it? Would this be thought good Reasoning in other Cases? I own there are Knaves and Fools in all Professions. And why, considering all things; why, I say, should we wonder more, to see a Deist, an Heretick, or Libertine, in an Ecclesiastical Habit, than to see a Coward in a Regimental Dress, Oppressors and Pick-pockets adorned with Titles of Honour, and riding in Coaches



Coaches and Six; or that Men chosen to be Guardians of a Constitution, should for Pensions and Places betray and ruin it? Yet of all these, we have many Instances in our English History, both before, and since the Reformation. And as our two famous Universities (whom God long preserve!) are the Seminaries of Religion, Learning, sound Reason, and good Principles; they are therefore attacked with the same blind outrageous Zeal; every scribbling Fool, whose want of Learning, Virtue, or good Manners, has expos'd him to the Censures of those learned and venerable Bodies, who has been either punish'd, or expell'd as an unworthy Member of a regular Society; is encouraged to vent all his Spleen, to exhaust his whole Stock of Dulness against those whom he calls the Authors of his Disgrace. Others that envy them their delicious Retirements, magnificent Structures, and ample Revenues, which the Piety of great and good Men has bestowed, for the Glory of God, the Honour of Religion, the Support of Learning and Learned Men; seek occasions to revile them as a Set of useless musty old Fellows, who eat up the Labours of the Industrious, and consume in Luxury and Idleness, what might be applied to much better Purposes. All this is Cant and Clamour, they know what they say to be false; but they know, that so long as those learned and venerable Bodies stand and prosper, their Free-thinking Schemes will make but slow Progress; the Genius of those Places will, in spite of Opposition, triumph at last, over the Spirit of Dulness

ness and Error that opposes it. May they then rejoice in their Revenues, and make a right Use of the blessed Advantages for Retirement and Study, which they there enjoy. May their noble Structures stand unshaken and inviolable, free from the worse than *Gothick* Invasions of Atheists, Libertines and Free-Thinkers; and may the Lord God add to the Number of their Sons and Friends, *how many soever they be, an hundred fold, and that the Eyes of my Lord the King may see it*, 2 Sam. xxiv. 3. But I have almost forgot my Subject.

XXIX. There is one difficulty yet behind; and that is to find out some Rule, to determine and fix the use of this equivocal Word *Reason*. In the modern Controversies betwixt Catholicks, Hereticks and Schismatics of all sorts; who, tho' they acknowledge the Authority of Holy Scripture, and refer themselves to its Decisions, yet are still divided in their Interpretation of them. Every Man's *Reason* tells him, that his own Opinion or Interpretation of Scripture is right: So that the Word of God, which we all agree to be the infallible Guide and Rule of Faith, is brought to patronize and justify the most contradictory Opinion, and is so far from being the Standard of controverted Truth, that it self is obscure and uncertain, and requires rather a Rule to interpret it, than to be it self a Rule for interpreting and explaining Difficulties. That this is the Case in Fact, is visible and plain. But that in the true Nature of Things it is quite otherwise, will, I hope be easily made appear, from these following

ing Considerations, in which the several contending Parties seem to agree.

1. *That all Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works,* 2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

2. That if it be not intelligible, it cannot answer the Ends for which it was given; for that no Man can be taught, reprov'd, corrected or instructed by what he does not or cannot understand.

3. That it is inconsistent, either with the Wisdom or Goodness of God, to give us a Revelation, to be a Guide to Truth, and a Rule of Righteousness, which is not easy to be understood by every honest Enquirer.

4. From whence I infer, that the Holy Scriptures are in their own Nature, a plain, easy, intelligible Standard of Truth and Rule of Faith; and that the Difficulties in explaining them are of our own making, arise not from any Obscurity in the Books themselves, but from a natural or moral Incapacity in the Readers or Interpreters.

XXX. If we consider the Holy Scripture, first as a *Rule of Righteousness*, a Pandect of divine Laws, for the Regulation of our Lives and Actions; I will be bold to assert, that there is nothing to be found throughout the whole, in which our Duty is concerned, and to which the Penalties and Rewards of eternal Misery and Happiness are annexed: but what is plain, obvious, and intelligible



ligible to every honest Enquirer ; and that allowing for the great Variety of different Readings in different MSS of the Original, and some Errors in the various Translations that have been made of them, yet that out of the very worst of them all, whether MS or Translation, a clear, uniform, intelligible System of Duty, may be drawn by any Man of common Honesty and Capacity. The Duties of Obedience, Faith, Devotion, Purity and Holiness towards God ; of Justice, Humanity, and Charity towards our Neighbour ; of Temperance and Chastity towards our selves, are express'd in so plain and intelligible Words, that no honest Man can be at a Loss, to understand his Obligation to perform them. But should a covetous Extortioner, whose Heart was set upon getting an Estate, right or wrong, ever take the Trouble of reading those Holy Books, he would certainly muster up all the formidable Objections, he could think of, to invalidate all those Precepts of Justice, Mercy, and Contempt of the World, that oppose his first Design, or testify against the Ways and Means he uses to accomplish it. He would complain of Interpolations, tell you of different Readings and Pointings in several old MSS, which give the Precept another Turn, and make it capable of a different Interpretation, that may answer the Grammatical Construction of the Precept, and at the same time, not interfere with his Interest or Inclination. Is it possible to express any Precept in plainer Words, than that in *Heb. xiii. 4. Marriage is honourable, and the Bed undefiled, but Whore-mongers and*

G 2

*Adulter-*

*Adulterers God will judge.* No Comment can make it plainer, yet do I know several true Protestants, who under the Dominion of an imperious Lust, and a more imperious Harlot, (pardon me, I should have said *Mistress*), or because they cannot marry with Conveniency, that is, with so great a Fortune as they think they want or deserve, or for some other wise Reason, have employed their whole Stock of Learning and Criticism, to evade and extenuate the Force and Obligation of this plain Precept. They have found in certain prophane Writers, who are the Standards of the *Greek* Purity, that Πῆγ- and Μοιχῆς, are very often used promiscuously. Well, and what then! Why from hence, they with great *Reason* of their own infer, that since Μοιχῆς confessedly signifies an Adulterer, one that invades his Neighbour's Bed, therefore Πῆγ- may signify the same; and so he that is only guilty of simple Fornication, may escape the Penalty of the Statute. But what egregious Trifling is this! Let it be own'd that the Words are sometimes promiscuously apply'd to the same Person: I fear there may be a worse Reason given for it than they imagine, *viz.* That he who is guilty of one, seldom makes much scruple to be guilty of the other. But would he honestly know the Meaning and Extent of the Precept, let him consider the Apostle recommending *Marriage* as an honourable State, ordained and sanctified by God, for the Propagation of Mankind; and the restraining those promiscuous Mixtures that would certainly follow, from a general and unlimited Use

of the two Sexes, which is abominable to God, and which he will not fail to punish severely. *i. e.* in plain English, chaste Marriage is honourable, but your Commerce with the Ladies without it, however fashionable and gallant, is a damnable Sin. Let us illustrate this by comparing it with any of our Acts of Parliament, as that against Simony, Bribery in Elections, defrauding the King of his Customs. Let us suppose, that the Legislature intended *bona fide* to make the Act so effectual, that it should actually prevent the Abuses and Corruptions it was intended to reform; and that they had express'd it in the plainest Terms that could be thought of. Can it now be conceived, that any Man who can read and understand the Language of his Country, can be at a Loss to know the Intention of the Legislature, the plain Sense and Meaning of the Act, and his own Obligation to obey and submit to it? No surely; but yet if any Man without attending to the Guilt of transgressing them, in point of Conscience, were resolved for his Interest to break thro' all or either of them; he would soon find certain nice Distinctions, quibbles about the different Meanings of Words, that should seem, at least, to give the whole an ambiguous Turn. And if he should be indicted in a Court of Justice, upon either of those Statutes, a large Fee would have the same Influence on the Understanding of the Council, as his View of Interest had upon his own. Words should be tortured and perverted from their natural and obvious Signification; the Construction and Pointing



ring of Sentences, should be examined with an hypercritical Nicety; in short, no Artifice, no Chicane, should be omitted. What to do? To discover the Truth? By no means, but to obscure, to perplex, to pervert it, and in a Word, to reconcile their Duty to their Interest, and to stifle that Evidence that thwarts their Inclinations. The Parallel is too obvious to need any Application.

XXXI. Let us now proceed to consider, the different Sentiments that prevail amongst Mankind, with regard to certain doctrinal Points, and Forms of Government and Discipline, in which every Man's *Reason* is his Guide. Every Man assumes a Right of *Reasoning* and Judging for himself, (which both God and Nature allow him) and upon his own private Judgment, he establishes a certain System of Doctrine and Discipline, and regulates his Practice of communicating with this or that Society of Men, and protesting against all that differ from him. Let us now suppose a Person free from any Prejudices of Education, Interest, or Party, unsettled in his Sentiments, and therefore desirous to enquire carefully and sincerely into the Truth of Things, in order to form his Judgment and direct his Practice. We must suppose him qualified to understand the Originals, able to fix and determine the precise Signification of certain Technical Words, which, in different Relations, and Connexions are various, extensive, and ambiguous. Such are the Words Ἐκκλησία, Ἐπίσκοπος, Πρεσβύτερος, &c. and to affix such Ideas to them, as the Nature

Nature of the Subject requires, and is consistent with the avowed Design of the Writer. He is next of all to compare the different Reasonings that may occur in those Writers, which may in a good Measure help to fix their Sentiments with regard to the Signification of such Words and Phrases, as are in their own Nature ambiguous. He is next of all to consider, the constant Practice of the Age in which those Writers lived ; and by comparing several Facts together, he may be able to determine the Use of certain Forms of Speech, which would be otherwise obscure and unintelligible, and the constant Practice and Traditions of succeeding Times, and from a fair and impartial Consideration of these Particulars, I will venture to affirm, that the Disputes about *Church-Government*, *Infant-Baptism*, and several other controverted Points, may be easily determined by candid and impartial Men. This is putting the Case upon a true Foot of *Reason*, weighing all the Evidence on both Sides of the Question, and judging accordingly. Such a Judgment so formed, may be properly called *Private Judgment*, it being the Result of the Enquiries and Reasonings of a *Private Person*, who was able and willing to search into the Foundation of certain Usages and Customs, established by Authority : But does by no means imply, that he, who for want of this impartial Examination, under strong Prejudices of Pride, Envy, Revenge, &c. shall determine on the wrong Side of the Question, is to be justified by such *private Judgment* ; or to be excus'd for acting erroneously on such erroneous

ous Judgment. For the *Truth* of Things is always immutably the same; and though 999 in 1000 should be mistaken in their Judgments about it, yet will not their Mistakes alter the Nature of Truth, nor destroy those necessary Relations that are betwixt the several Ideas of Things. Thus a Demonstration in Mathematicks or Algebra, must be formed upon a right Understanding of the several Parts or Numbers, and the Proportion they bear to each other; which, whoever does not understand, cannot apprehend the Force of it; yet will not his Misapprehension alter the Truth of the Problem, or the necessary Relation of the several Parts and Numbers on which it is formed. And if such a one should pretend to justify his Errors, by impertinent *Reasons* of his own, and insist upon his Right of thinking freely, and judging for himself, he must be contemptible to every Man of Learning, Modesty and Judgment; for at this rate, there would be no such thing as positive Truth in any thing, but all must be resolved into the Whim and Caprice of Fools and Madmen. And it would not be Bigotry, or slavish Subjection of such a Man's Understanding, to submit his *Reason* to the Decision and Determinations of others, whose Skill, Abilities, and Method of Study has made him better able to judge of such disputable Matters. This is the Way we are all apt to take in the Concerns of our Health and Property. Should a sick Man send for a Physician, and yet refuse to submit to his Prescriptions, because he cannot account for the Natures and Virtues of each Drug

or



or Simple, the *Reason* of their Composition, and the specifick Operation of each in his Case; he would certainly die unpitied, as an ignorant, conceited, obstinate Blockhead. So in a Case of Law, where a Man's Estate was in danger, upon some intricate Perplexities in his Title, or some Omission in his Deeds of Conveyance, would not he be a great Fool, who would not take the Advice of a Lawyer, whose Ability and Integrity he had no reason to suspect, because he could not apprehend the direct Tendency of every Step or Motion made for his Security? Yet this is the present Case of Thousands, in the more important Concerns of Religion; they first ignorantly take up Principles, which they resolve obstinately to defend; if they meet with a Man, able and willing to set them right, who enters into the Nature of Things, shews them the Connexion of Ideas, and the just Inferences arising from them; they retire into their Works, intrench themselves in their own Stupidity, which they call the Dictates of *Reason* and *Conscience*, and from which they resolve never to recede. There are other Points of a more abstracted speculative Nature, such are the Doctrines of *Justification*, *Predestination*, *Schism*, &c. which properly come within the Verge and Province of *Reason*; and notwithstanding the many Volumes written *Pro* and *Con*, may by a Person of right *Reason*, and an honest Heart, be very easily and plainly accounted for, by comparing the various Meanings of the different Words, as found in different Places of Scripture, and applyed to different

H

Purposes,

Purposes, and pursuing the Thread of Reasoning the holy Author uses in the Proof of it, or his arguing from it. Thereby he will soon perceive certain Ideas affixed in different Respects to the same Words, some of which are entirely irreconcilable to the Nature of Things, when viewed in another Light, and therefore cannot be true in this: So that for Instance, that Notion of Justification, that implies any thing contrary to the Goodness and Justice of God, the Necessity of real Holiness, *without which no Man shall see the Lord*; or contradicts any other plain Truth of natural or revealed Religion, cannot be true. On the contrary, that Notion which reconciles all these seeming Contradictions, that neither encourages a dead unactive Faith, nor a vain Presumption of our meritorious good Works; that reconciles by a clear Connexion of Ideas, the Satisfaction of our Blessed Saviour, with the Necessity of working out our own Salvation; that Notion cannot be false.

XXXII. The Nature and Guilt of Schism, is yet plainer to be understood, as depending on fewer and more simple Ideas; so that a moderate Share of Understanding, with due Attention, Sincerity, and Ingenuity, cannot fail to give a Man a right Notion of it: And did I not know, the monstrous Artifice and Impudence of some of the Leaders, and the more than superstitious Credulity of the Herd; I should be as much surprized at the several Separations from the Church of *England*, as I should, to see a whole Nation at Loggerheads upon the Question, whether a  
Triangle

Triangle had three Sides as well as three Corners; and yet they all talk gravely of their *Reason*, and offer many *Reasons*, as they call them, for their Separation, which consist of a certain Cant, an odd Form of incoherent Words, uttered with a formal Countenance, which are handed thro' the Crowd, by a Few, who are in the Direction of the Party; who most certainly act upon *Reasons*, but such as they dare not own to the abused Multitude, who are led by the mere Force of empty Sounds, artfully apply'd, into the most absurd Notions, and unreasonable Practices. There is for Instance, a natural Malignity in the Words *Popery*, *Popish*, *Anti-Christian*, *the Mass*, *Hierarchy*, &c. the Sound of them implies Error, Confusion, Tyranny, the Devil and all his Works. On the other Hand, there is a Soul-saving Sweetness, a native Benignity, in the Words, *Protestant Religion*, *Gospel Ordinances*, *Moderation*, *Edification*, &c. by a right Application of which, the Populace among them are as absolutely led and directed, as any piece of Machinery upon Mr. *Powel's* Theatre. Words of such Importance alarm and awaken into a Posture of Opposition or Defence; the Impression they make are too strong to bear Reflexion, they anticipate the Use of *Reason*. Who ever saw the young Gentry in any Street of this polite Town, sit down to reason calmly, when the formidable Cry of a *Mad Dog* was given? They take the Alarm at once, *Jamque faces* *à l'axe volant* — in Defence of their Lives and Liberties. On the other hand, even the Echo



of those evangelical Words, *Protestant, Moderation, Charity, Sincerity, &c.* is supposed to spread a blessed Influence, wheresoever they are applyed. There is no Design so pernicious, no Scheme so unchristian, no Project so vile, but is sanctified by a right Disposition of them, in the several Parts and Incidents of the Scheme; and nothing can be meant, or said, or done amiss, where all or either of these are in View: And I have often made it my Observation, that they are never so frequently applyed, nor so zealously inculcated, as when there is something a doing, that requires some fanative Virtue to correct its Malignity; as Antidotes are never so needful, as when there is Danger or Suspicion of Poyson. Upon the whole, they make as unreasonable Pretences to *Reason*, and *Freedom of Thought*, as their Brethren the *Free-Thinkers*. And I must take the Liberty to say, that till they are able to prove, by a clear and evident Chain of *Reason*, that the Terms of Communion with the Church of *England* are unreasonable and sinful, they must not take it ill to be told, that they are guilty of Schism, or a causeless Separation from a sound Branch of the Catholick Church.

XXXIII. Nor will it avail them any thing, to insist upon their *Sincerity*, a Plea that may with as much Propriety, be urged in Defence of Treason or Horse-Stealing, as of Heresy or Schism. I have often wondred, what *Reason* (except *Reasons* of State, which are always out of the question) could influence a Prelate of great

great Learning and Sagacity, to scatter such a loose indigested Notion amongst the giddy unstable Multitude; and to make it, as he seems to have done, the chief, if not the only qualification for Acceptance with God. Surely a Matter of such Importance, ought to have been treated, in the most exact and critical Manner: The Word should have been carefully explain'd, its Meaning confirmed and illustrated, and the whole Notion nicely examined, before so great a Weight should be laid upon it, which perhaps it could not be able to bear. The common and popular Notion of *Sincerity*, is a plain, open, and undisguised Behaviour; and a *sincere* Man, is one that says what he thinks, or means what he says\*. And, I can assure his Lordship, whatever Intention he might have, this is the Sense, in which the generality of his Friends and Admirers understand it, who upon his great Authority speak Peace to their Consciences, and think themselves justified before God and Man, for professing openly, what they really and *sincerely* believe, be it in its own Nature true or false: So that at this rate, there is no such thing as positive Truth in the Gospel; or if there be, it is not necessary to Salvation, that it should be known; there is at this rate, no necessary Connexion betwixt evan-

---

\* In this Sense of the Word, Vanini, the Neapolitan, who was burnt at Thoulouse, 1616. for denying God, which he did to the last, may pass for a very good Protestant, he was doubtless Sincere.

For he that burns, or hangs, or breaks his Brains,  
The Devil's in him, if he feigns.

gelical Truth and evangelical Holiness : So that  
 had there been no *Scripture given by Inspirati-*  
*on of God, a Man might have been perfect and*  
*thoroughly furnished to all good Works.* In this  
 respect, indeed, there may be some Shadow of  
 Truth; for had no Law been given, there could  
 have been no Transgression; and they that were  
 without Law, would have been judged without  
 Law. That is, God is not so austere a Master,  
 to reap where he has not sown, nor to gather  
 where he has not strawed. But what have we  
 to do to judge them that are without, those  
 that are without God judgeth; to his infinite  
 and uncovenanted Mercies we leave them. But  
 our Case is quite different : We have a clear and  
 plain Revelation of the Will of God, a regular,  
 uniform, coherent System of Truth and Doctrines,  
*a Form of sound Words, even that Faith which*  
*was once delivered to the Saints;* every Tittle  
 and Article of which, is eternally and immutably  
 true, and bears a necessary Relation to our Sanctifi-  
 cation and Salvation; *this Truth as it is in Jesus*  
*Christ, this sincere Milk of the Word,* is to feed  
 and nourish us to eternal Life; *this Truth is to make*  
*us free,* to deliver us from the Bondage of Sin,  
 Error and Death; and if the Truth makes us free,  
*then (and not else) are we free indeed.* This  
 sacred *Depositum* was lodged in the Church, as  
 an invaluable Treasure, not to be suppressed, em-  
 bezzled, or adulterated. For this Reason, St. Paul  
 commands Titus, *ch. ii. v. 7.* to shew in his  
 Doctrine, Sincerity, *Ἀφθαρσίαν*, Uncorruptness,  
 not handling the Word of God deceitfully, &



καὶ πάλιν ὁ λόγος τῆς Θεᾶς, 2 Cor. ii. 17. So that though I do not pronounce every Error of Judgment to be damnable: God forbid! Yet I do assert, that so far as we are in Error, so far are we out of the Way of Salvation, though we fancy we are in the Right. But if we consider this Notion of *Sincerity* in another Light, I will agree with his Lordship, that *Sincerity* is the great Foundation of Truth, Obedience, Holiness, and Acceptance with God: But by *Sincerity*, I mean as the Holy Scriptures do; a natural Rectitude of Heart and Will, an earnest Desire to know the Will of God, and practise it, a Freedom from vicious Habits and Prejudices, an impartial honest Search after Truth, without sinister Views and By-Designs, without Prospects of Honours, Applause, or Vain-Glory, or any other end, than the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Souls: This is the Ἀφθαρσία, Ἀλυσία, Εὐθυμερία mention'd in Scripture; this is what our blessed Lord calls *the single Eye*, and pronounces upon it, that if *our Eye be single, our whole Body shall be full of Light*.

*Sincerum est nisi vas, quodcunque infundis acescit.*

If there be any foul Tincture in our Hearts, it will communicate it self to every Perception of the Soul, and like a foul Stomach will turn the best Nourishment into Corruption; but if the Heart be clean, and a Man be in this Sense of the Word Sincere, I pronounce it impossible for him

him to err from the Truth: For our Saviour has assured us, that *if we thus ask, we shall have, if we thus seek, we shall find, if we thus knock, it shall be opened unto us*: He has promised his *holy Spirit to them that ask it sincerely, and that Spirit shall guide us into all Truth*. Let us suppose, a *Clergy-man* under an habitual Inclination to Ambition or Covetousness: This will lay a Byass upon all his Motions, and he will by insensible Degrees form to himself such a Scheme of Doctrine and Manners, as may visibly consist with his predominant Propension; he assumes a soft agreeable Air of Conversation, is obsequious and complaisant, especially to his Superiors, and takes Care to say nothing that shall shock or disoblige them, especially if good Preferment, a warm Deanery or a fat Bishoprick be in view. This obliges him to soften and qualify several severe Precepts of the Gospel, and to talk affectionately of Moderation, good Manners, &c. when his Conscience calls upon him, to oppose their Prophaneness, and rebuke their Vices. If he finds the Current of the Times run visibly into some fashionable epidemical Error, he either strikes in with it, or takes Care to speak diffidently, or as he calls it, modestly about it; and this he may do so long, as at last to loose the Truth, and be confirmed in Error: As a Man may tell a Lye so long, till at last he believes it to be true. But will his sincere Belief, that what he says is true, make it cease to be a Lye? Will any Man's sincere Belief that Error is Truth, change the Nature of Things, or alter that

that necessary Relation there is between real Truth, and real Holiness, *without which, no Man shall see God?* And if Men by neglecting the gradual progressive Search after Truth, which we have already observed; be in that Sense 'Αμα-  
 θής, or *Unlearned*, and for want of due Humi-  
 lity and love to God, which fix the Soul, and  
 keep it steady, as solid Foundations do a Building,  
 or deep Roots a Tree; in which Sense, the  
 Apostle mentions our *being rooted and grounded*  
*in Love*, become 'Ασέμντοι, or *unstable*; if they  
*wrest the Holy Scriptures* from their true and  
 genuine Meaning, and make them patronize any  
 Errors in Doctrine or Practice; how Sincere so-  
 ever they may be in their drawing Conclusions,  
 how strongly soever they may be persuaded to  
 the contrary, they do it *to their own Destruction*, 2 Pet. iii. 16. And as for our *Arian* Adver-  
 saries, who talk more of their Reason, and as  
 much of their Sincerity, as the Schismatics; the  
 learned World will soon have a very mean Opi-  
 nion of either, unless they quit their Pretensions  
 to both, after having been so clearly, so ratio-  
 nally, so learnedly, confuted by those many  
 eminent Defenders of the Catholick Faith, that  
 have of late gloriously distinguished themselves  
 in that Controversy.

XXXIV. Thus have I taken a short View of  
 this popular Word *Reason*, which makes so much  
 Noise, and has done so much Mischief, in the  
 Mouths of empty Pretenders to it; all that I have  
 endeavoured to shew, is, that Religion does not  
 contradict it: But to expect to comprehend and  
 explain



explain the sublime Truths and Mysteries of the spiritual World, by this weak low Principle, is absurd and impossible. There are in every true Christian, three distinct, constituent Principles, *Body, Soul, and Spirit*; each of which have their distinct Powers, Faculties, and Offices. By our bodily Senses, we converse with this material World, survey the several Parts of Matter, examine their Forms, Bulk, Dimensions, and other sensible Qualities: From hence we raise Ideas, which are lodged in the Memory, or painted on the Imagination, and to judge of these, to compare their several Habitues and Relations, and draw Conclusions, is the whole Province of *Reason*. The third and highest Principle, is what the holy Scriptures, and ancient Writers call the Πνεῦμα or Spirit, which is that Principle, Power, Faculty, or what you please, in intelligent Beings, appropriated to the spiritual World; for every Body must allow, nay it is clear to a Demonstration, that *spiritual* Beings, as *such* can never be conveyed thro' the bodily Senses, to the Understanding, and it is a most certain metaphysical Axiom, *that nothing can be in the Understanding, that was not first in the Senses*. And therefore we must either be entirely deprived of Faculties, for communicating with spiritual Beings; (*i. e.* we must be deprived of the only Means of our supreme Felicity, and for attaining the End for which alone we were created, *viz.* communicating with *the supreme and absolute infinite Spirit*) Or else we must have a Principle in us, distinct from, and superior to the rational Soul.

Upon

Upon all which accounts it is evidently plain, that the *rational Soul* is not that Faculty in compounded intelligent Beings, which in the Order of Nature, and the Analogy of Things, is appropriated to *the spiritual World*: But that they are endowed with a bodily Sense, and a rational Soul, to communicate with the material World, and with a *Spirit* and *divine Senses*, to communicate with the Spiritual. So that as material Things, are conveyed to the rational Soul, thro' the bodily Senses; so spiritual Things are conveyed thro' the divine Senses to the Spirit; *this Spirit* in Man lying dormant in him, till awakened by Baptism and Regeneration, either receives the quickening and enlightening Operation of the divine Spirit, in the Soul of a Believer, or is it self that Manifestation so appropriated to it, as to be always with it, and numerically distinct from the like Manifestation in the Souls of others. And as in the *Nature, Reason*, and Analogy of Things, *the Light* of the Sun, (that glorious Representation and *Vicegerent* of God in the material World) is the Medium thro' which material Objects are seen and perceived in our System: So the *essential Light* of God, which is his only begotten Co-eternal Son, the second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, is the sole Medium, by and through which, his Nature and infinite Perfections are to be perceived and understood; and therefore, as certainly as the Sun sends forth his Light on the whole material World, without Bounds or Limits; so certainly the *Sun of Righteousness*, the Arche-

type of our material *Sun*, sends forth his enlightening and enlivening Beams, on all the System of created intelligent Beings, and is *that Light which enlightens every Man that comes into the World*. From these three distinct Principles, arises that Distinction in Holy Scripture, between the Σαρκινός, the carnal Man, the Ψυχικός, or natural Man, and the Πνευματικός, or spiritual Man. The carnal Man is under the Dominion of the Flesh, whose whole Delight is in gratifying his Senses and fleshly Appetites, and these make up the Bulk of Mankind, and differ from the natural Man, as a sagacious Brute does from a Man of Sense. The natural Man is he that has improved his rational Faculties, and prefers the Exercise of his Understanding, before the Gratification of his Senses; these are the great Masters of *Reason*, the Leaders of the *Free-Thinking Tribe*, cunning Statesmen, acute Philosophers, good Linguists, and Orators; but yet are as much inferior to the spiritual Man, as the most illiterate Labourer or Mechanick, to the most subtle Philosopher and Politician. These three distinct Principles, have their proper Objects adapted to them, in the most exact Harmony and Proportion. So that as in the natural Body, the Eye cannot perceive the Harmony of Sounds, nor the Ear apprehend the Beauty of Colours, nor the Symmetry of Proportion, nor any one Sense taste or apprehend what are the proper Objects of another; and as the united Power of all the Senses cannot apprehend, much less demonstrate any abstracted Truth, no more than



than a Man can smell a Syllogism or eat a Demonstration; so neither can all the Powers of Reason, apprehend those spiritual Truths, and Mysteries of Religion, which are only to be apprehended by the Spirit; which is with regard to them, the same as the Organs of Sense are to their proper Objects. Hence it is evident, that he who would judge, determine, and pursue, the practical Conclusions of those Determinations, about the Nature and Properties of *spiritual* and *divine* Things, by his *Reason*, acts as contrary to *Reason*, as he that should attempt to see without Eyes, or hear without Ears. The highest that this feeble Faculty can pretend to in these Matters, is from the known, certain, and experienced Nature and Properties of material Things, (to which *Reason* is in some Measure adequate) to apprehend a proper Analogy, and from the visible Things of this lower World, which are low Images of the spiritual and invisible Things of God, to frame imperfect Likenesses and Representations of these superior Objects, and that in short, is all that *Reason* can do in these sublime Matters. There is no apprehending worthily the Things of God, but by the *Spirit of God* operating upon *our own Spirit*. For *the Spirit beareth Witness with our Spirit, that we are the Sons of God*, Rom. viii. 16. And this in short helps us to the true Notion of evangelical *Faith*, which is something more than a rational Assent to evident Propositions, which make (as a learned Man was pleased to express it) *the whole Syllogism of Faith*; it is  
the

*the Light, the Truth, the Power, the Gift of God*; it is the Substance, or Essence, the Ὑπόστασις of those Things, that are the Objects of a Christian's Hope, a real, substantial Efflux and Communication from the heavenly and spiritual World, upon the Soul of a Believer, in which Light he sees what the natural Eye cannot, he perceives clearly those Truths, which we call Articles of Faith, which cannot be apprehended by *Reason*; the Evidence of Things not seen, Ἐλεγχόμενα, a spiritual Perception, Taste, View, of the invisible Things of God; and this Notion of Faith runs thro' the whole 11<sup>th</sup> Chapter to the *Hebrews*. Were this a proper Place, I would consider this Doctrine more fully under *the Object, the Subject, and the Act of Faith*; but I must return to my Subject.

XXXV. As this is the plain Doctrine of Scripture, as I shall shew more fully by and by; so it is of the greatest and most eminent Philosophers of the *Gentile World*, *Pythagoras, Hierocles, Socrates and Plato*; and is most beautifully illustrated, in that venerable Piece of ancient Learning, *The Table of Cebes*, where each Class or Order of Men, are included in their proper *Septum* or Enclosure, without any possibility of ascending from the Inferior to the Superior, but by the Guidance and Assistance of the Guardian Wisdom, and proper Dispositions in the Disciple. The same Truth is most expressly taught in the little Fragment we have of that old Poet *Phocytides*, where speaking of the different Powers and Faculties, implanted by God, in the  
different

different Species of Creatures, for their Defence and Ornament; he says of Man, Λόγῳ δ' ἔρμηνεύεται ἀνθρώποισιν, that Reason is his Defence, considered in his natural State; adding,

Τῆς ᾗ Θεοπνεύσεως Σοφίης λόγῳ ἔσιν ἄριστος.

That his true Perfection, is that Wisdom that comes from above. *Naumachius* calls this Spirit, Ψυχῆς ὄμμα φαεινόν, which being united by a kind of mystical Marriage, to the Λόγῳ or Word of God, brings forth Conceptions full of Light and Glory.

————— μυστήρια  
Θεοπεσίοις επέεσσι νοήματα φάεα τίχλει.

Intimating hereby, that this Spirit of ours, is the only Faculty in us, that is capable of receiving the divine Light or heavenly Wisdom, as the natural Eye is of receiving the Light of the Sun. This mysterious Communication of divine Light to the Soul, is in the Language of the Old Testament, emphatically call'd Σοφία, or Wisdom, and accordingly is in innumerable Places of the Books of *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Psalms*, *Wisdom* and *Ecclesiasticus*, spoken of as the Gift of God, not to be obtained by the acutest Reason or the clearest Head, but is the Reward of Purity, Humility and Prayer. Thus holy *Job*, chap. xxviii. v. 20. *Whence cometh Wisdom, and where is the Place of Understanding, God understandeth the Way thereof, and knoweth the Place*



*Place thereof; and unto Man he said, the Fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil, is Understanding. But Ch. xxxii. 8. he is more exprefs, there is a Spirit in Man, and the Inspiration of the most High, giveth him Understanding. All Wisdom cometh from the Lord (saith the Son of Sirach, ch. i. v. 1.) and is with him for ever, the Word of God most High is the Fountain of Wisdom, and her Ways are everlasting Commandments. Upon this Principle St. Paul reasons in his first and second Chapter in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, and by this he accounts for the Opposition made by the wise Men, and Disputers or Free-Thinkers of that Age, against the Preaching of Christ crucified, and the Doctrines of the Gospel. For he expressly pronounces that the φύσις, the natural or rational Man receiveth not the Things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned. They can no more apprehend spiritual Truths, than a blind Man can see Colours, or a deaf Man hear Sounds, each of them wanting proper Organs to convey this Sensation to their Souls.*

XXXVI. We are not therefore to wonder, that Wits, the Beaux, the Critick, and all the Herd of Triflers cavil at this Way of talking, and call it Cant and *Enthusiasm*. Were the Doctrine of Colours, and the several beautiful Varieties of Lights and Shades ever so accurately treated of before a Man born blind; or a Lecture in Opticks, to be read at a Horse-Race, or in a Country Fair,  
both

both would certainly be voted down as unintelligible Jargon and Nonsense, whereas were the Eyes of one to be opened, and the Understandings of the others gradually instructed and prepared, they would at once perceive, what no Chain of Reasoning could otherwise teach them. In short, the Root of all that Scepticism and Infidelity, which at present abounds among us, and aims at nothing less than the unsettling all Foundations of Religion, is the wickedness and immorality of Men's Lives. The young, the gay, the thoughtless, who shine and flutter about this great Town, who enjoy a Flush of Blood and Fortune, who are in the Bloom and Flower of Youth, surrounded with Temptations, and enchanted with Pleasures, are not at Leisure to think gravely and seriously of abstracted Truths; and tho' sometimes under some little Mortifications of Sickness, ill Fortune, Spleen, Satiety of Pleasure, or the Pangs of a Debauch, they may be forced to retire and think whether they will or no, yet their Thoughts are then so discomposed and superficial, that they cannot enter into the Nature of Things, nor form any just Conclusions or Resolutions upon them: Or if by Chance they should, they find themselves so uneasy under a Chain of Reflexions, that gall and disquiet them, that they are forced to silence the Reproaches of their Consciences, and by new Debauches endeavour to blot out the Remembrance of old ones. And in the mean time, as their Faculties grow daily more feeble, and their Consciences more hardened, those Reflexions

that once startled them, seem to lose their Force, are less pungent and affecting; so that at last they begin to flight and disbelieve them, and muster up all the little Arguments that the Devil and corrupt Nature can suggest that they are vain Terrors, mere Bugbears, to fright Children and Fools, and as they grow older, and consequently less able to Sin, and therefore less diverted from thinking seriously, they are then forced to defend and propagate their Infidelity, that they may by this means quiet their own Consciences, and make the Cause more reputable by the Weight and Number of its Patrons and Profelytes.

XXXVII. Having thus found out the Root of the Distemper, we may be more easily directed to the Cure. As a wicked and immoral Life is the certain Cause of Infidelity and spiritual Blindness, so nothing contributes more to the Perception of Truth, than the living a righteous, temperate, sober and holy Life. And now, Gentlemen, let me address my self to you as Philosophers, Lovers of Truth, Enemies to Error and venerable Superstition, as I also profess my self to be; your Title and Profession obliges you to prove and examine all Things before you determine your Judgments. Let me conjure you, in his Name, who is the *God of Truth*, and by all the Regard you bear to that venerable Name, and the Dignity of your own Understandings, that you would at least consider the Proposal here offer'd you, and if you can be convinced, that there is any Shadow of *Reason* or probability in it,



it, resolve to follow it; but by way of Experiment, renounce your Sins, mortify your Lusts, lay aside your Prejudices, be obedient, innocent, and simple as little Children, and then begin your Enquiries anew, seek for Wisdom as Silver, and dig for her as for hid Treasures, and you shall certainly find her, *for into a malicious Soul, Wisdom will not enter, nor dwell in the Body that is subject to Sin.* If thou desire Wisdom (saith the wise Son of Sirach, ch. i. v. 26.) *keep the Commandments and the Lord shall give her unto thee; for the Fear of the Lord is Wisdom and Instruction, and Faith and Meekness are his Delight.* In a Word, the first Rudiments of Christian Knowledge are laid in the Heart; do ye, therefore, but punctually live up to the Morality of natural Religion, and that will dispose you by Degrees for Christianity, and that Wisdom that cometh from above. Nor is there any Hazard or Danger in the Experiment, you venture nothing that is worth keeping, in pursuit of an invaluable Treasure; you are abridged none of the real Comforts of Life, but only to enjoy them in a more *rational* Manner, and if after all, the Success should not answer; should there be no Truth, no Reality in this solemn Affair of Religion, should there be no future World, no Immortality of the Soul; why, even then you could be no Losers, we should all sink together into eternal Oblivion, and you would never regret the little Gratifications, if any, that you resigned in this. But if it should be true, should you find an eternal Inheritance, an incorruptible

ble Crown of Glory, reserved for you as a Reward of your short imperfect Obedience; how inexpressibly great will your Joy, your Reward, your Happiness be, and how infinite will the disproportion appear, betwixt their Case, and those who are condemned to lose this blessed Inheritance, and to be shut up for ever in Darkness, Misery and Despair? Since then it plainly appears, that in the worst View of the Case, the Hazard you run, bears no Degree of Proportion, to the Prize proposed; that you venture nothing, to obtain every thing, you must quit your Pretensions to *Reason* and common Sense, if you doubt one Moment which to chuse.

*FINIS.*

6 JUL 165

